Handout from the Conflict of Interest (COI) workshop

Wikimedia Conference 2016 in Berlin

Scenario 1: services for an event

Situation: Your group is about to stage an event requiring a physical venue (e.g. a Wiki Loves Monuments award ceremony). The event requires catering services. One of the board members has a brother who owns a catering company, and proposes that you hire this company's services for the event. It can be arranged quickly, and the brother promises "a good price".

- What is the potential COI? (i.e. what's the connection? what's the benefit?)
- What is an appropriate way (or ways) to manage the COI?

Scenario 2: Partnering with the National Bureau of Statistics

Situation: Wikimedia Fictionland (WF) is interested in partnering with the national bureau of statistics (responsible for national census and other government statistics) to release data into Wikidata, and to cover expenses for some "data-thons" to incorporate the data. A board member of WF works for the bureau as a statistician.

- What is the potential COI? (i.e. what's the connection? what's the benefit?)
- What is an appropriate way (or ways) to manage the COI?

Scenario 3: Working at a GLAM institution, creating a GLAM partnership

Situation: Wikimedia Fictionland would like to partner with Fictionville Museum, to promote freely licensed cultural works in the museum's collection. A board member of Wikimedia Fictionland works for the Museum, and believes that this partnership will be mutually beneficial for both organizations' educational mission. Wikimedia Fictionland will provide a press release and other publicity for the partnership.
- What is the COI? (i.e. what's the connection? what's the benefit?)
- What is an appropriate way (or ways) to manage the COI?
- **Twist:** Does it change anything if the museum is the 1-room Shoelace Museum? What?

Scenario 4: Producing a free classical music event for Commons

Situation: Wikimedia Fictionland has secured a free venue, and is producing a free classical music concert to be recorded for Commons. Wikimedia funds are used for refreshments and equipment; all musicians are appearing as volunteers. Alongside works by Bach and Beethoven, two short pieces composed by a board member of Wikimedia Fictionland will also be performed.

- What is the COI? (i.e. what's the connection? what's the benefit?)
- What is an appropriate way (or ways) to manage the COI?

Scenario 5: <insert your own scenario here>

Situation: <describe the situation to your group>

- What is the COI? (i.e. what's the connection? what's the benefit?)
- What is an appropriate way (or ways) to manage the COI?

Key points from the Conflict of Interest (COI) workshop

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Do you have some preliminary advice?

Yes! **DON'T PANIC**. Conflict of interest is not a dark mystery, and should not paralyze you or your organization. Clarity on its nature and some basic guidelines are all you need.

What is Conflict of Interest in the context of organizational governance?

A conflict of interest (COI) exists when, **in a specific context** where **one is a decision-maker** or otherwise **has influence over a decision** in a group or organization, and one has **a personal or financial interest** (benefit) that **competes, or appears to compete**, with it.

For a COI to arise, **both** the **influence** and the **competing interest** need to exist. The competing interest (benefit) **must not interfere** with one's duty to the organization and the organization's best interest.

But what about [[Wikipedia:COI]]?

Wikipedians tend to use the (governance) term "COI" in a the context of **content neutrailty** more than in the context of governance. On Wikipedia, "conflict of interest" is most often referring to an interested party (person, business, government) **editing content** about itself or its projects or interests, often in a non-neutral way. The conflict is between the interests of the encyclopedia (accurate and complete information presented from a neutral point of view) and the interests of the editor (present oneself or one's business in the best possible light).

Do not [let others] confuse content COIs with governance COIs.

So what are some ways to *manage* a [real or perceived] conflict of interest?

- Active **disclosure** of COI
  - A culture of candor and open **discussion** of [potential] COIs
  - **Document** your disclosures and discussions
- **Exclude** the interested person from decision making. **Recuse** from voting. **Prevent** influence (e.g. remove from room/conversation)
  - **Document** this.
- Use **due diligence** in decision-making.
  - **Document** the due-diligence efforts.
- **Refer** the decision. **Broaden** the circle of decision-makers. (e.g. if too much of the board is in [potential] COI, refer the decision to the general assembly.)
- Consider taking some **preemptive steps** to **avoid future conflicts of interest**:
  - Implement **a policy on identifying conflicts of interest**.
  - Implement **a gift policy** to avoid the appearance of bias.

Any more guidance?

Yes! Please visit **[[m:COIG]]** for a fuller guide from the Wikimedia Foundation. Full URL: https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Conflict_of_interest_guide_for_Wikimedia_movement_organizations